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## HOW ROME GOVERNED THE PROVINCES.

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To the student of political and of religious history alike, the story of Rome's career—her dominion and her downfall—is always a subject of fascinating interest. To Professor Freeman, Rome appears as the centre of universal history; to Professor Schaff, as the herald of Christianity. To Niebuhr, Rome was a mighty sea into which all the civilizations of antiquity emptied themselves, and from which all the civilizations of the modern world have taken their rise; to Augustine, the wreck of the Roman Empire furnished a foundation for the City of God. Nearly all the institutions of Rome seem to possess a kind of sacred as well as secular significance. The basilica in which sat her courts of justice became the models of Christian temples. The language of her statesmen and poets became the vehicle of Christian ritual and song. The gigantic network of roads over which marched her victorious armies were trodden by the missionaries of the Cross. The imperial power which subdued and organized the Mediterranean world also gave an external victory and unity to the Christian church.

This twofold interest which attaches to nearly everything that is Roman is, of course, due to the peculiar and close relation existing between Christianity and the political system into which it was born. The Roman Empire, indeed, furnished the environment of early Christianity. Born in a Roman province, the Founder of the new religion affirmed that the duties of men included their obligations to Cæsar as well as their obligations to God. St. Paul, in becoming an apostle to the Gentiles, became in fact a missionary to the Roman provincials; and, while performing his duties as a Christian preacher, also cherished his rights as a Roman citizen. The early Christians, while seeking to build up

a kingdom which was not of this world, could not entirely disentangle themselves from the all-encircling influence of Rome. Whether we read of the birth of Christianity in the New Testament Scriptures, or its pitiful struggles during the period of persecutions, or its triumph as the established religion of the state, we must always feel that its external history was largely conditioned by the laws, the institutions, and policy of Rome. On this account the knowledge of the Roman system of government, especially during the first century, seems to be a necessary auxiliary to the study of the New Testament. Within the space allotted to this article it will be possible to indicate only in a very general way the character of Rome's provincial government, and the burdens and benefits which it involved.

Those who are accustomed to examine the government of Rome in order to find the causes of its decline and fall, are often inclined to overlook the causes of its growth and greatness. That Rome fell at all may be sufficient to indicate that her government possessed elements of weakness ; but that she preserved her dominion in the West for twelve hundred years after the founding of the city, and in the East for a thousand years longer, is certainly an evidence that her political system possessed some remarkable elements of strength. In seeking for a generalization to indicate the political progress of the world, Professor Fiske declares that the principle of the Oriental world was conquest without incorporation ; of the Roman world, conquest with incorporation but without representation ; of the modern world, incorporation together with representation. This is sufficiently concise to indicate the source of Rome's political strength. When she conquered the Mediterranean world she did not rest upon her conquests. The goal of her achievements was not dominion, but organization. It was not by her sword, but by her law, that she desired to rule the nations.

The attitude which the imperial city assumed with reference to her provinces seems to have grown out of a policy which may be said to be almost coeval with the founding of the city itself. According to the received theory, Rome sprang into existence by the union of three distinct tribes, or hilltowns, which came to

form the integral elements of a single body politic. Such a corporate union gave her strength to compete successfully with the neighboring towns of Latium, and, with the pacification of that territory, she learned that the granting of liberty was the price of loyalty. The Latin towns, while obliged to acknowledge the supremacy of Rome, were permitted to retain their rights of local government, and also to share with Roman citizens the civil rights incident to commercial and matrimonial relations—the *commercium* and *connubium*. With the extension of the Roman power over the Italian peninsula, conquest was followed in a greater or less degree by incorporation. By granting a variety of privileges to the different towns in Italy, according to their degrees of loyalty, Rome was able not only to retain her supremacy, but also gradually to bring her subjects into a corporate union with herself. This process of union was, it is true, often too slow for many of her subjects, and under the later Republic was hastened by the forcible demands of the allied towns. After the Social War, however, and the legislation which resulted from it, the incorporation of the Latin towns became practically complete, and Rome and Italy were one.

While this policy, which might be called one of progressive incorporation, was growing up in Italy, the limits of the Roman dominion were slowly encircling the countries washed by the Mediterranean. When once fairly drawn beyond the natural bounds of Italy, whether by hostile intrigues or by friendly gifts, her passion for conquest was inflamed; and no limits seemed to her secure short of those fixed by Augustus—the Rhine and the Danube on the north, the Euphrates on the east, the sands of Arabia and Africa on the south, and the ocean on the west.

To govern this vast domain of heterogeneous elements was a task for which Rome herself seemed at first not fully prepared. Her provincial system was largely the result both of experiment and of evolution, and the extension of the system which had already grown up in Italy. Her great practical insight enabled her to see that the provincial cities, like the Italian towns, could not at first be treated alike; and hence the most marked feature of her government was its pliancy and adaptability. While she had a love

for supremacy, she had no passion for uniformity. The barbarian West and the civilized East were almost two separate worlds; and she adjusted her rule to the existing arrangement of each. It is true that she broke up all confederacies and combinations which threatened her supremacy; but she at the same time respected the local institutions which had already become a part of the life of her provincial subjects. In Sicily the entire judicial and financial system of the king of Syracuse was maintained; the old method of taxation by tithes was preserved, and afforded no cause of complaint until the scandalous governorship of Verres. In Greece the local government suffered very little change, and even the confederacies were allowed to exist so far as they were merely religious in their character. In Egypt the territorial and political arrangements of the Ptolemies became the groundwork of the provincial government, and it is said that the people looked upon the Roman governor as a sort of vice-king, who had stepped into their throne. In Palestine, before the curatorship was established, the Jews retained their own local institutions, and were ruled by governors chosen from their own people.

In connection with the adaptability of the Roman rule, and the respect paid to existing arrangements, should be noticed the gradual extension of the Roman franchise and the policy of progressive incorporation similar to that which had prevailed in Italy. The towns or cities of the province, like those in Italy, formed the basis of the Roman administration. Guizot regards the whole Roman empire as simply an organization of cities. The province was, in fact, nothing but a group of towns in a given territory placed under control of a governor appointed by the central authority. There was the same gradation of privileges among the provincial towns as had already existed in Italy. For the sake of clearness we may group the various provincial towns as follows: First, Roman towns, including (*a*) Roman colonies and municipia, and (*b*) Latin colonies and municipia; and, secondly, non-Roman towns, including (*a*) free towns, allied and non-allied, and (*b*) tributary or stipendiary towns.

The Roman towns, in general, were those which possessed, either in whole or in part the Roman franchise, and were organ-

ized upon a Roman model. The difference between a colony and a municipium was mainly a difference of origin—the former being a body of citizens sent into the province, the latter a body of provincials admitted into the state. The colony might be called a child by birth, the municipium a child by adoption. But the two terms were sometimes interchangeable, and the same constitutional form characterized them both. The more important distinction among Roman towns—whether colonies or municipia—consisted in the fact that some possessed the full Roman franchise, while others possessed only the Latin right of *commercium*. Alexandria, Troas, Antioch in Pisidia, and Philippi were full Roman colonies. Their inhabitants possessed equal rights with those of the imperial city. Their municipal constitution was modeled after that of Rome. They passed their own municipal laws, levied their own taxes, and administered justice under their own charter, or the law by which their towns had each been constituted a municipality.

The non-Roman towns were, of course, those which had not received the Roman franchise or the Roman form of government. But a wide difference separated those which were free—*civitates liberæ*—and those which were tributary—*civitates stipendiariæ*. The free cities, whether such by treaty or by sufferance, were permitted to retain their own government, and were secure from foreign interference. They were generally relieved from the garrisons of Roman soldiers, and from the insignia of Roman officers. Such cities were the Syrian Antioch, Tyre, Tarsus, Rhodes, Thessalonica, Athens, and nearly all the cities of Greece. While the inhabitants of these towns did not possess Roman citizenship by virtue of their residence, they might as individuals receive the franchise as a special gift, or by birth from one who had already received it, as was the case with St. Paul. But the large majority of non-Roman towns were not free, but tributary; and while they were generally permitted to retain their own internal government and laws, they were obliged to bear the chief burdens of the Roman rule.

But with all the variety of privileges which marked the provincial towns, there was a constant and growing tendency to

assimilate them to the condition of Roman colonies and municipia, until with the edict of Caracalla (215 A. D.) all the free-born subjects of the Roman world were granted the full rights of citizenship. Thus it was that the policy of conquest was attended by the policy of incorporation.

A group of towns in a given territory—however diverse may have been the privileges granted to them at the time of their conquest—were constituted a province by the appointment of a governor and the passage of a "*lex provinciæ*" which defined in a general way the authority delegated to the provincial officers. The "*lex provinciæ*" may be regarded as a sort of charter, or written constitution, intended to secure the persons and the property of the provincials from the uncertainty and caprice of their different officials. To the governor was given the military and judicial, to the quæstor the financial, administration. These officers, with their subordinates, were supposed to rule the province, not according to their own will, but according to the law of the Senate. If the provincial government under the republic was accompanied by great evils, it was due not so much to the law as to the fact that the law could not make upright men. The Roman governors were frequently men in whom all real public spirit had died out, and while they may have appeared impartial in the administration of civil justice, and have been compelled to respect many of the constitutional rights of the cities, were yet evidently disposed to seize every opportunity to benefit themselves at the expense of their subjects. Although it was a law that every governor was answerable, at the expiration of his term, for the character of his administration, it was too often the case that these officers were not held legally responsible for the performance of those duties which the "*lex provinciæ*" or the imperial commission required.

The chief burdens which rested upon the people of the provinces may be summed up as military and financial—the levy and the tribute. We are accustomed to think of the Romans as pre-eminently a military people. If we confined our attention to the period of conquest during the Republic, when every man was subject to military service, and when the energies

of the state were for the most part devoted to foreign conquest, such a characterization would not be far from correct. But with the establishment of the Empire, and the development of the standing army, there was a manifest decay of the martial spirit. The military burdens which rested upon the Roman people under the early Empire were far less severe than those which now rest upon most of the countries of modern Europe. In the reign of Tiberius the total number of troops has been estimated at 320,000 men. Gibbon estimates the population of the Empire at about 120,000,000. To-day Germany, with a population of 47,000,000, supports a permanent army of 492,000 men; and France, with 38,000,000 of people, supports an army of 555,000 men. Or, to put the comparison in another form, the chief countries which now occupy the territory of the Roman Empire are Spain, France (including Algeria and Tunis), Italy, Greece, and Turkey (including the tributary states). These countries have a population of about 121,000,000, or a little more than that which Gibbon assigns to the Roman Empire. But the permanent armies of these countries, when reckoned on a peace footing, number more than 1,130,000 men; while the war force of these countries amounts to more than 4,500,000 men (*Statesman's Year-Book* for 1890). With such facts as these staring us in the face, we are hardly in a position to declaim loudly against the military burdens resting upon the Roman provincials.

But the most grievous burden which the provincials were compelled to endure was that resulting from taxation. To support the armies, to provide for a host of civil officials, to keep in repair the public works, to support the worship of the state, to feed the populace and to pension the soldiers, to provide for the public spectacles and sports, to meet the luxurious and prodigal expenditures of the emperors,—required the use of nearly every form of revenue—taxes upon arable land, upon pasture land, upon the produce of the soil, upon mines, upon incomes, upon wares and slaves sold in the market, upon inheritances, upon imposts. But the most oppressive and corrupting feature of the financial system was the method of farming the revenue. Instead of collecting the taxes through state officers, the taxes



were let out to a society of publicani, who guaranteed to the state a certain amount of revenue. The state was thus spared the expense of collection, but the province itself suffered greatly for this convenience. The publicani were authorized to collect only the amount imposed by law, but every temptation existed for corruption and extortion. The service, which was ostensibly undertaken for the state, was perverted to private gains; and the system of "spoils" thus introduced resulted not only in robbing the provinces, but also in undermining public virtue and official integrity.

Over against these burdens may be mentioned certain benefits which the provincials derived from the Roman rule; and chief among these were the reign of comparative peace within the provinces, and the introduction of a universal system of law. It is of course possible to exaggerate the importance of the *Pax Romana*, as it is also possible to depreciate its significance. With the exception of the conquest of Britain and the wars of Trajan, there were no important wars of aggression undertaken from the time of Augustus to that of Marcus Aurelius. The most unjust military act of the early Empire was without doubt the reduction of Jerusalem. With these exceptions it may be said that the Empire was devoted to the interests of peace. But the comparative pacification of the world under the Roman rule was made possible only by a system of universal law. The *jus gentium*, the Roman "law of nations," that law which was higher than the law of any single community, and which was the most important element of Roman jurisprudence and also the greatest bequest of Rome to modern civilization, was in large part an outgrowth of Rome's provincial system.

With our present historical perspective it is possible to see many defects in the Roman system of government. Autocratic power, prodigality in public expenditures, the absence of representation, the decay of public spirit and of official integrity, the opportunities afforded for political corruption, the growth of the "spoils system," the lack of sufficient constitutional protection against arbitrary authority—not to mention slavery, social immorality, economical distress, which, though features of Roman

society, were not distinctive elements of the political system,—are enough to show that the Roman Empire fell far short of a perfect state. But with all its defects, the Roman Empire has bequeathed to modern society certain principles of political authority and of legalized rights without which our boasted Teutonic freedom and individualism might have proved inadequate to the needs of a well-ordered state. Of the two antithetical elements—liberty and law, freedom and authority—which must be united in the synthesis of a perfect state, one of these at least we have inherited from Rome. And it may be a question whether we may not have received from the same source a larger share of the other element than we are inclined to admit. When we remember how far the forms of constitutional liberty have descended to us from the chartered rights of municipal and commercial corporations, and the extent to which the chartered rights of corporations are traceable to a Roman source, we may be prepared to open our minds to the conviction that the Roman law was not merely an instrument of authority, but also a protection of civil liberty; and that, in view of such inestimable gifts, we should exercise some Christian charity in weighing the defects even of the pagan Empire. It is only within the last century that the world has come to a full appreciation of representative and constitutional government as a worthy substitute for centralization and absolutism; and it may be a serious question whether we have yet entirely divested ourselves of those dangerous features of political life which in no small degree contributed to the downfall of the Roman Empire.